

critical digest

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The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

New York Openings This Week

Mrs. McThing-Martin Beck, 2/20/52. ANTA's second subscription play stars Helen Hayes in a comic fantasy by Mary Chase. Directed by Joseph Bulooff, with Jules Munshin, Enid Markey, Irwin Corey and Brandon De Wilde...Dear Barbarians-Royale, 2/21/52. Gant Gaither presents a new comedy by Lexford Richards. Cloris Leachman, Violet Heming, Betsy von Furstenberg and Nicholas Joy are featured, staged by the producer. Intermission music played by Cy Coleman and Trio.

Digests of Current Reviews - more inside

Collector's Item-Booth, 2/8/52-2/9/52. Worst play of the season so far, daily reviewers agreed in their unanimous panning of new comedy by Lillian Day and Alfred Golden which closed after three performances. Settings by Charles Elson were sole element of Reger Clark and Lloyd Isler's production to win praise. Cast in the play about the antique business was not blamed for the dull, cliché-ridden script and the haphazard direction by Clark and Golden. Coleman, Mirror, thought idea did have satiric potentialities that the authors failed to capitalize on. Both Hawkins, World Telegram & Sun, and McClain, wondered what made all concerned bother with script in first place. Sheaffer, Eagle, found it a collector's item only for masochists, though he did admit there were several funny items in mid-script. Allyn Jeslyn, James Gregory and Gage Jordan headed the cast.

Jane-Coronet, 2/1/52. Weekly reviewers, like their daily colleagues, were split over merits of S.N.Behrman's new comedy based on a story by W.Somerset Maugham. Theatre Guild production starring Edna Best, Basil Rathbone and Howard St. John won mild "pro" reviews from critics of Variety, Newsweek, Cue, New Yorker. None thought the narrative particularly strong, but all felt director Cyril Ritchard and cast brought out the best in the typical Behrman witty dialogue. Lardner, New Yorker, believed the silken flow of Behrman writing was pieced out with ribbons of dental floss to make it last two hours. Cue man called it a "drawling" room comedy, while Time critic billed it as an urban, but upsy-downsy drawing room comedy. Francis, Billboard, turned thumbs down because premise of script is frail and rather silly, while Time said "no" because play didn't cut a wide enough swath in its telling. Shipley, New Leader, panned dialogue for being full of clichés and false glitter, while the play itself is vulgar and banal enough to be a hit.

Dickens Readings-Golden, 2/5/52. With but slight reservations the appraisers of the magazines and trade journals okayed S.Hurok presentation of Williams' limited run "readings." Both Variety and Billboard reporters found it interesting, but doubted commercial appeal. McCarten, New Yorker, also enjoyed evening, but suggested it might make hard going for audience not used to elocution. Time critic believes Williams will give a really topnotch show when he tackles the really great comic figures in Dickens. Gabriel, Cue, called it a rare affair, picturesque and somehow very heartening. He is sure that when Williams finally does meet Dickens "over there" he will apologize to him for the reviewers who have foolishly guessed that Dickens himself couldn't act half as well.

News & Notes

"New Republic" will drop all reviews starting with March 1st issue, editorial offices have moved to Washington, D.C. Clurman has resigned his drama critic post.

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' A Key to NYC Criticism At A Glance '
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|------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. NY Times | 12. Chr.Science Monitor | 23. WCBS Leonard |
| 2. NY Herald Tribune | 13. Journal of Commerce | 24. Commonweal |
| 3. NY News | 14. Morning Telegraph-WFDR | 25. Cue |
| 4. NY Mirror | 15. Ward Morehouse | 26. Nation |
| 5. NY Compass | 16. George Jean Nathan | 27. New Leader-WEVD |
| 6. NY Post | 17. Wall Street Journal | 28. New Republic |
| 7. NY Journal American | 18. Women's Wear | 29. Newsweek |
| 8. NY World Tele-Sun | 19. Billboard | 30. New Yorker |
| 9. Breoklyn Eagle | 20. Variety | 31. Park East |
| 10. L.I.Press | 21. Critical Digest | 32. Saturday Review |
| 11. Newark News | 22. Theatre Arts | 33. Time |

Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them, not if they think they will be hits. "So-so" means the critic did not state directly if he recommends the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening. Unless otherwise noted critics voted "pro."

AFFAIRS OF STATE-9/25/50	Con: 1-6-9-11-12-15-16-17-18-22-23-24-25-28-29-32. None: 10-14-21-26-27. So-So: 31.
CALL ME MADAM-10/12/50	Con: 19-22-26-28. None: 10-14-21-23. So-So: 3.
THE CONSTANT WIFE-12/8/51	Con: 3-25-30. None: 11-13-14-15-17-18-21-26-28-31-32.
THE FOURPOSTER-10/24/51	Con: 2-6-15-16-22-24-27-30-33. None: 14-18-26-28-29-32.
GIGI-11/24/51	Con: 1-4-5-6-8-12-15-25-27-28-32-33. None: 14-23-31.
GUYS AND DOLLS-11/24/50	Con: 26. None: 10-21.
I AM A CAMERA-11/28/51	Con: 3-5-7-12-27-28. None: 10-13-14-18-21-26-31. So-So: 1.
JANE-2/1/52	Con: 2-7-9. None: 5-10 thru 17-19 thru 33.
THE KING AND I-3/29/51	Con: 26. None: 10-21-22-24.
THE MOON IS BLUE-3/8/51	Con: 16-22. None: 10-21-26-32.
PAINT YOUR WAGON-11/10/51	Con: 2-6-7-15-20-23-24. None: 14-18-27-28-31-32.
PAL JOEY-1/3/52	Con: 27. None: 13-14-17-28-31-32.
POINT OF NO RETURN-12/13/51	Con: 8-16-22-26-27-33. None: 7-11-14-21-23-31.
REMAINS TO BE SEEN-10/3/51	Con: 1-7-16-18-21-22-24-26-28-30-33. None: 12-13-17.
THE SHRIKE-1/15/52	Con: 8-16-22-26-27. None: 12-13-14-17-21-31-32.
SOUTH PACIFIC-4/7/49	Con: 33. So-So: 25. None: 5-9-10-11-21-24-26-27-28.
STALAG 17-5/8/51	Con: 4-25-26-27-30. So-So: 3. None: 10-21-22.
TOP BANANA-11/1/51	Con: 6-7-27. None: 12-26-28-31-32.
TWO ON THE AISLE-7/19/51	Con: 2-3-26. None: 10-12-27-28-32.

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' Theatre News Round Up '
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Shows that closed include Collector's Item, Bagels and Yox and Come of Age... Council of Living Theatre Cincinnati drive to net 4000 new subscribers for Theatre Guild-American Theatre Society five play season...ANTA Sunday matinees of Desire Under the Elms offering cut rate student and teacher seats...Chicago company of The Moon is Blue running Tuesday night 7:30 PM curtain...G.Maillard Kesslere presenting 6000 photographs and 500 paintings to Theatre Collection of New York Public Library...Gertrude Lawrence and Yul Brynner returned to cast of The King and I...Essay contest for New York high school students' thoughts on "Pygmalion, A Living Memorial to Shaw's Greatness" judged by Rice, Post...Tennessee Williams and Carson McCullers elected to National Institute of Arts and Letters...Picture article by Morehouse, WT&S, in current Collier's...Carmody, Washington Star, visiting shows in New York City.

' Green Room Department '

BUSINESS HOURS...Seven P.M. Monday night curtain at South Pacific hailed by "Printer's Ink" editorial. Producers have realized, points out the advertising trade paper, that many changes have taken place in living, buying and recreational habits in the past 50 years. Broadway is starting to recognize that time is a major competitor of the consumer's attention and patronage. Changes in business and service hours in other fields have usually resulted in increased receipts.

CRITICAL THOUGHTS...Jose Ferrer aims to be a one man Theatre Guild, surmises Zolotow Times...Watts, Post, has no intention of dropping his favorite cliches just because the anonymous article in "Theatre Arts" objects to them...Coleman, Mirror, trusts that thousands will visit the "Theatre Hall of Fame" soon to be established at Franklin & Marshall College, Lancaster, Pa. Critic hopes it will become a national shrine.

PLAY SUICIDE...Though misguided sponsors and day laborers may blame swift folding of Collector's Item on unanimous panning, Chapman, News, never saw a clearer case of self-destruction. Twin tip-offs before the critics got to their typewriters came with inspired bad acting of cast which didn't believe in script and misplaced applause by prejudiced latecomers.

ACTORS ON CRITICS...Pal Joey director David Alexander plans to organize an acting group that will try out new plays, thus helping both actors and writers, he told Sheaffer, Eagle, Alexander wants critics, producers and directors to attend his rehearsals of this group, to ask questions and to learn more about their own crafts...Basil Rathbone, Jane, admitted to Morehouse, WT&S, that he freezes on opening night because he realizes that eight or nine critics mean the rest and food, the school fees and baby clothes.

MAIL BOX...Playgoer who has seen The Shrike at least six times explains in long, detailed letter to Pollock, Compass, why he believes Joseph Kramm script is genuine and complete symbolism from beginning to end. The moral concept is "Self Betrayal is a Living Death"...Theatregoers must vehemently protest against killing off the reasonably priced matinee ticket, a Times reader warns.

TICKET COURTESY...Two "Cue" reporters discovered that New York box office men, despite propaganda to the contrary, are a patient, courteous breed. They failed to rouse any anger at the seven box offices they investigated.

' Off Broadway '

Yerma-Circle in the Square. Two mild "pros" and two "cons" filed on Left Players production of Federico Garcia Lorca's drama. The theatre in the round production, which started a two month run, was staged by Jose Quintero and features Miriam Green in the title role. Rice, Post, tabbed it the ambitious group's best production to date. Drama editor particularly recommended it for theatre and literature students. Vene, Variety, found it a satisfactory, though not searing, production. Calt, Times, and Sheaffer, Eagle, thought poetic script was beyond the group. Latter suggested it might be interesting if presented by Spanish actors.

' Legit Stuff '

Bill Watters named Hollywood editor of "Theatre Arts"...The Laurence Oliviers and Rex Harrisons guests at February "Drama Desk"...A Little Evil folded in Boston.

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' Random Drama Notes '
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BOOKS...John Parker's 11th edition of his "Who's Who in the Theatre" to be issued this month by Isaac Pitman & Sons, London, will contain 3000 listings of U.S. and British actors, price \$15...Eugene O'Neill's play "A Moon for the Misgotten" to be published by Random House this fall..."Grand Right and Left" novel by Kronenberger, Time contains same characters found in his play The International Set...Norris Houghton's "But Not Forgotten: The Adventure of the University Players" published by Sloane...Macmillan to publish "Theatre of Two Decades" by Audrey Williamson, "Reflections on the Theatre" by Laurence Irving, and "Theatre World Annual" by British editor Frances Stephens...Press agent Ralph Kettering has finished book of reminiscences, "Behind the Magic Curtain."

FILMS...Paint Your Wagon bought by Louis B. Mayer, to star Gary Cooper...Two film ready to make Shakespeare's Julius Caesar...Gene Kelly to star in MGM's Brigadoon, which will be filmed abroad this summer...Warner's to film Reinhardt hit of the 20s The Miracle...Lippert Productions to film the life of B.S.Pully, Guys and Dolls comic...Twentieth Century Fox filming What Price Glory...Stalag 17 author Edmund Trzcinski playing role in Paramount film of his play...Several film companies bidding for The Shrike...Tennessee Williams working on Mississippi Woman, film to be made from series of his short plays...Main Street to Broadway film sponsored by Council of Living Theatre plans to start in March, MGM will release it.

TV AND RADIO...The Petrified Forest, by Robert E. Sherwood, to be produced February 20 on ABC TV Celanese Theatre...Theatre Guild and United Paramount Theatres planning closed circuit TV productions of Guild plays...Variety reports that producers chilly toward telecasts of shows after Anna Christie folded soon after broadcast...Oliviers turned down \$100,000 for one shot telecast of Antony and Cleopatra...Pincus Brothers signed with Authors League of America to present "Theatre of America" dramas by top writer members, Eugene Burr is to be script editor..."Gorilla Sketch" by Jean and Walter Kerr, Herald Tribune, used on NBC TV "Royal Showcase"...Morehouse, WT&S, play The Lady with a Will to be telecast...CBS TV Toast of Town to devote two programs to "Cole Porter Story"...Billboard suggests NBC TV "Today" either hire a regular drama critic to cover openings or train one of their staff for this chore.

RECORDS...Recording of tabloid versions of plays by Oscar Wilde, Arthur Wing Pinero and GBS planned for Ethel and Lionel Barrymore...Columbia to record Babes in Arms with Mary Martin...Capitol to record original cast of Three Wishes for Jamie due to open in New York March 14th...Pal Joey album by Capitol has all of "original" cast except leads Vivienne Segal and Harold Lang...Columbia cancelled plans to wax flop A Month of Sundays.

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' Digests of Current Reviews '
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Venus Observed- Century 2/13/52. Diverse set of reviews, per usual, filed by daily critics on Theatre Guild's production of Christopher Fry's new verse drama. Kerr, Herald Tribune, and Atkinson, Times, panned script for being too fragile and wordy. Former admitted that he was a Fry man himself, but that this time the master seemed to be giving aid and comfort to the enemy because he had blinded himself with words. Coleman, Mirror, and Chapman, News, billed Laurence Olivier staged play starring Rex Harrison and Lilli Palmer as Fry's best. Coleman, who noted play deserves a second hearing, hopes the producers will extend show past 16 week limited run. Watts, Post, and Hawkins, WT&S, wrote admittedly "so-so" reviews. They joined others in praising Fry's wonderful use of language, but feared at many times play was cryptic. McClain, Journal American, found it an extremely gratifying evening in the theatre, even if you won't understand it all. Several noted that theatre was much too big for such a work to be seen at its best. Cast was praised for doing a fine job of reading, if not always acting, the lines.

